

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 HA-05 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
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-----058140 100934Z /10

P R 100730Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7919
INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KABUL 3783

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINR, AF
SUBJECT: WILL BABRAK KARMAL EVENTUALLY BECOME THE LEADER OF THE
NEW AFGHAN REGIME?

REF: A. KABUL 3511 (NOTAL); B. KABUL 3577

1. REFTTEL A PRESENTS BASIC BIOGRAPHIC DATA ON BABRAK KARMAL (POPULARLY KNOWN AS BABRAK), THE VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL AND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER. THIS MESSAGE ASSESSES WHAT WE KNOW OF THE MAN AS AN INDIVIDUAL AND AS A POLITICAL LEADER, AS WELL AS HIS POTENTIAL FOR EMERGING AS THE REAL POLITICAL POWER WITHIN THE NEW GOVERNMENT.

2. AS A YOUTH, BABRAK WAS REPORTEDLY REGARDED AN "OUTSIDER," A POOR STUDENT, AND WAS GENERALLY IGNORED AND SHUNNED BY HIS CLASSMATES. A NUMBER OF OBSERVERS SPECULATED THAT IT WAS BECAUSE OF THIS EARLY ISOLATION AND LONELINESS THAT BABRAK ADOPTED EXTREME POLITICAL VIEWS IN ORDER TO ATTRACT ATTENTION AND OBTAIN RECOGNITION. AT ANY RATE, HIS RADICAL STUDENT ACTIVITIES
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PROMPTED THE AUTHORITIES IN 1952 TO PUT HIM IN JAIL, WHERE HE SPENT THE NEXT FIVE YEARS.

3. THIS PERIOD OF IMPRISONMENT MARKED A WATERSHED IN BABRAK'S LIFE AND POLITICAL THINKING, FOR IT WAS THEN THAT HE CEMENTED HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH MIR AKBAR KHAIBAR, THE "FATHER OF AFGHAN COMMUNISM," WHOSE MURDER APRIL 17 SET OFF THE RECENT EXPLOSIVE

CHAIN OF EVENTS. ACCORDING TO SOME OBSERVERS, WHILE HE WAS IN CONFINEMENT WITH KHAIBAR, BABRAK'S "AGGRESSIVE LIBERALISM" WAS TRANSFORMED INTO A COMMITMENT TO COMMUNISM. THE BABRAK-KHAIBAR RELATIONSHIP WAS A LASTING ONE, AND DID NOT END UNTIL THE LATTER'S SLAYING.

4. FOLLOWING HIS RELEASE FROM PRISON, BABRAK FINISHED HIS EDUCATION AT KABUL UNIVERSITY, GRADUATING FROM THE FACULTY OF LAW IN 1957. AFTER SERVING AS A MINOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS, HE WAS ELECTED TO PARLIAMENT IN 1965. BABRAK'S EIGHT YEARS IN PARLIAMENT (THAT BODY WAS DISSOLVED IN JULY, 1973, AFTER MOHAMMAD DAUD'S COUP) PROVIDED HIM THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP AND DISPLAY HIS ORATORICAL SKILLS AND HIS TALENTS AS A POLITICAL TACTICIAN. BABRAK MADE A NUMBER OF SPEECHES -- MOSTLY ANTI-GOVERNMENT -- WHICH SOME EMBASSY OFFICERS AT THAT TIME DESCRIBED AS GENUINE "MASTERPIECES" OF ORATORICAL DEMAGOGY. THE STIR THESE ELOQUENT HARANGUES CREATED WITHIN THE AFGHAN BODY POLITIC CAUSED BABRAK TO BECOME BETTER KNOWN THOUGHOUT THE COUNTRY THAN EVEN THE PRIME MINISTERS OF THE MOMENT.

5. ANOTHER INCIDENT WHICH MAY HAVE REINFORCED BABRAK'S RADICAL POLITICAL VIEWS, AND WHICH ADDED TO HIS NOTORIEYT AND "VISIBILITY," OCCURRED IN 1967. ALONG WITH ANAHITA RATEBZAD (HIS REPORTED MISTRESS, AND NOW MINISTER OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS), AND NOOR AHMAD NOOR (NOW MINISTER OF INTERIOR), BOTH OF WHOM WERE CONFIDENTIAL

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ALSO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, BABRAK WAS SERIOUSLY BEATEN ON THE FLOOR OF PARLIAMENT, THE ATTACK HOSPITALIZED HIM FOR SEVERAL WEEKS. THIS INCIDENT SPARKED SYMPATHY DEMONSTRATIONS BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, AND CONCEIVABLY COULD HAVE SOWNED THE SEEDS OF LASTING SUPPORT FOR BABRAK AMONG THIS GROUP OF YOUTHFUL ACTIVISTS.

6. MOST OBSERVERS HAVE HAD CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTY GETTING A HANDLE ON BABRAK'S TRUE POLITICAL OUTLOOK. THE GENERAL CONSENSUS HAS BEEN THAT HE HAS BEEN LITTLE MORE THAN A "FRONT-MAN" FOR THE REAL "IDEOLOGICAL LEADERSHIP," MIR AKBAR KHAIBAR, BUT THAT HIS "RABBLE-ROUSING" SKILLS WERE USEFUL TO THE MORE SCHORARLY PROFESSIONAL COMMUNIST LEADERS. BABRAK AND KHAIBAR FORMED THE BREAKAWAY PARCHAM WING OF THE KHALQ PARTY IN 1967, BUT HIS SPLIT WAS APPARENTLY MOTIVATED MORE BY PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES THAN BY SUBSTANCE (NOOR MOHAMMAD TARAKI, THE NEW PRESIDENT OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL AND PRIME MINISTER, REMAINED IN CHARGE OF HIS KHALQ WING). IN THIS REGARD, ONE EMBASSY OBSERVER REPORTED THAT BABRAK APPEARED TO BE A "BOURGEOIS COMMUNIST" WHO DID NOT HAVE A PROFOUND GRIP ON COMMUNIST IDEOLOGY. ANOTHER OBSERVER COMMENTED THAT BABRAK HAD ABOUT "ONE-HALF HOUR'S WORTH OF TAPED SLOGANS" WHICH HE WOULD DISGORGE NON-STOP AT

EVERY OPPORTUNITY. IN RECENT YEARS, SOME HAVE EVEN ACCUSED HIM
OF BEING A DAOUDIST AGENT.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KABUL 3783

7. LOOKING AT BABRAK'S PARLIAMENTARY SPEECHES, HE HAS APPEARED
TO BE PRO-PUSHTUNISTAN, ANTI-U.S. (IN THE SENSE THAT HE HAS
HURLED BARBS AT WHAT THE U.S. STOOD FOR), VERY PRO-USSR, AND
VERY ANTI-MONARCHIAL. IN ADDITION, BABRAK HAS EXPRESSED PRAISE
FOR FORMER KING AMMANULLAH (A PROGRESSIVE AFGHAN KING DEPOSED
IN 1929 IN A WAVE OF REACTIONARY CONSERVATISM). ALTHOUGH HE
HIMSELF IS A PUSHTUN, HE HAS STATED SUPPORT FOR THE RIGHTS OF
AFGHANISTAN'S NON-PUSHTUN MINORITIES (TAJIKS, UZBEKS, ETC.)
AND OF AFGHAN WOMEN. ON MOST OF THESE ISSUES, ALTHOUGH NOT ON
ALL, HIS VIEWS DO NOT DIFFER SIGNIFICANTLY FROM THOSE OF TARAKI
(REFTEL B).

8. NEVERTHELESS, THE DECADE-LONG SPLIT BETWEEN THE TARAKI WING
AND THE BABRAK-KHAIBAR WING OF THE AFGHAN LEFTIST MOVEMENT
(WHICH THE NEW LEADERSHIP NOW CALLS THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC
PARTY OF AFGHANISTAN (PDPA) -- A RETURN TO THE NAME ORIGINALLY
USED IN THE EARLY 1960S, BEFORE THE 1965 FOUNDING OF THE KHALQ
PARTY), COUPLED WITH THE WELL-KNOWN INTENSE PERSONAL ANIMOSITY
WHICH ONE EXISTED BETWEEN THESE LEADERS, INDICATES THAT THESE
DIFFERENCES WILL NOT BE EASILY LAID TO REST NOW THAT THE
REVOLUTION HAS TAKEN PLACE. IN FACT, REPORTS -- AS YET UN-
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SUBSTANTIATED -- ARE ALREADY MAKING THE ROUNDS THAT SQUABBLES AND ARGUMENTS HAVE BROKEN OUT REGARDING JOB ASSIGNMENTS AND POLICY WITHIN THE CABINET AND BUREAUCRACY.

9. MOST OBSERVERS HAVE INFERRED -- AND THE AVAILABLE EVIDENCE SUPPORTS THE THESES -- THAT, THROUGHOUT HIS POLITICAL CAREER, BABRAK HAD DEPENDED ON KHAIBAR FOR HIS INTELLECTUAL INSPIRATION, AND THAT HE HAS NOT BEEN AN ORIGINAL THINKER IN HIS OWN RIGHT. WITH KHAIBAR'S DEATH, AND GIVEN BABRAK'S REPORTED PAST DISTRUST AND HATRED FOR TARAQI AND HIS SUPPORTERS, IT WILL BE SIGNIFICANT TO NOTE WHICH PERSON BABRAK WILL NOW TURN TO FOR HIS POLITICAL GUIDANCE. IN SPITE OF THE THINNESS OF HIS OWN IDEOLOGICAL BASIS, THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT BABRAK IS A TALENTED POLITICAL INTRIGUER AND OPERATOR, ASSETS WHICH WILL BE INVALUABLE TO HIM AND THE PDPA DURING THE REGIME'S COMING "CONSOLIDATION" PHASE, ESPECIALLY IF THE LEADERSHIP'S INFIGHTING BECOMES FAIRLY ROUGH. THUS, ASSUMING BABRAK SURVIVES WHATEVER "SHAKING DOWN" LIES AHEAD, WE ANTICIPATE THAT HE WILL PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN DETERMINING THE FUTURE COURSE OF THE REGIME AND AFGHANISTAN -- AND COULD WELL REPLACE THE MORE SCHOLARLY, OLDER, AND FRAIL TARAQI AS LEADER. BABRAK'S ACTIONS, HOWEVER, WILL PROBABLY BE BASED EITHER ON PAST EXPERIENCE, ON THE ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF TRUSTED COHORTS, OR ON OTHERS (BABRAK'S REPORTED TIES WITH THE SOVIETS ARE ESPECIALLY OMINOUS IN THIS REGARD). THESE SOURCES MAY NOT NECESSARILY PROVIDE THE RIGHT ANSWERS TO THIS COUNTRY'S SERIOUS DOMESTIC PROBLEMS.

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